

## **Naltrexone Reduces Drinking in Vets with Schizophrenia and Alcoholism**

VISN 1 MIRECC researchers have shown that naltrexone increases abstinence and reduces binge drinking in VA patients with both Schizophrenia and Alcoholism. Schizophrenia is a devastating mental illness affecting around 1% of the general population and often leads to disability because patients have persistent disordered thinking, hallucinations and delusions. While complete recovery is rare, many patients with schizophrenia can lead comparatively normal lives with treatment and social support. Unfortunately, those diagnosed with schizophrenia are at high risk for alcoholism and drug abuse, which dramatically reduce chances for improvement. Alcohol abuse is associated with increased psychotic symptoms, poorer medication compliance, more emergency room visits, higher hospitalization rates and worsened social adjustment. Compared with other patients with alcoholism and drug abuse, those with schizophrenia have greater difficulty cutting down or stopping their substance abuse. Prior to the current study, no medications have been shown to be effective in reducing drinking in patients with both schizophrenia and alcoholism.

Naltrexone is one of only two medications approved by the Food and Drug Administration as treatment for alcoholism. Naltrexone has been shown to reduce relapse and heavy drinking days by removing the rewarding effects of alcohol and reducing the tendency to binge drink. Patients with a diagnosis of schizophrenia had been excluded from previous naltrexone efficacy research. In this study 31 male veterans with both alcoholism and schizophrenia were treated with either naltrexone or placebo (sugar pills) for 12 weeks in addition to their usual VA treatment. Patients treated with naltrexone had significantly better outcomes in heavy drinking days, days abstinent from any alcohol use and alcohol craving. Treatment completers on naltrexone had nearly eliminated their alcohol use and reported heavy drinking on only 3% of days and any alcohol use on only 8% of days. The findings of this study contrast with a recent VA cooperative study that failed to show efficacy for naltrexone in veterans with alcohol dependence without other mental illness. The present study suggests that naltrexone may play a particular role for vets whose alcoholism is added to serious mental illness. MIRECC researcher, Ismene Petrakis led the research team that included MIRECC researchers Bruce Rounsaville, James Poling, Colette McHugh-Strong and John Krystal and Yale researcher Stephanie O'Malley.